

SideQuest
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Executive Summary

SideQuest is a mobile app designed to simplify and enhance social planning for Gen Z, specifically college students aged 18–23. The platform addresses a clear market gap: while Gen Z consumers strongly desire more in-person connections and social interactions, they face significant voids in planning activities due to time constraints, financial limitations, decision fatigue, and coordination challenges.

Members of Gen Z report high levels of loneliness despite having active relationships that they value. Research reports that up to 80% of Gen Z experience a sense of loneliness within a year (Harlow). This feeling could be attributed to the idea that planning social activities is perceived as stressful and time-consuming, with over half of the surveyed students spending over two hours organizing trips or outings. Common grievances include disagreements within groups, budgeting issues, and the overwhelming number of options available. As a result, many friend groups abstain from meeting up, reinforcing social isolation despite a strong desire and ability to connect.

SideQuest solves this problem by offering a “blind box” activity planning system that curates personalized experiences based on users’ preferences, budgets, and time constraints. The app integrates key features such as group preference aggregation, budget-based pricing tiers, travel time optimization, and pre-built itineraries. By utilizing data from the likes of Google, TikTok, and shared calendars into a single platform, SideQuest removes friction from the planning process and makes it an enjoyable, novel experience for friend groups . The value proposition is centered on three core benefits: convenience, affordability, and excitement. Users save time by eliminating the need for extensive research, reduce stress through automated coordination, and gain access to curated, engaging activities they may not have discovered otherwise. Importantly, the “blind box” element introduces novelty and spontaneity, appealing to Gen Z’s interest in unique and shareable experiences.

In summary, SideQuest addresses a critical behavioral and emotional gap in the Gen Z market by reducing planning friction and enabling meaningful social experiences. By aligning with consumer needs for efficiency, affordability, and connection, the app is well-positioned to capture demand and redefine how young adults plan and engage in social activities.

Consumer Insights

Through a multitude of secondary sources, it is found that people have a low tolerance for planning, and value their time. The American Time Use Survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that people spend on average 35 minutes a day socializing, with much higher socializing on weekends, displaying constrained windows for weekday plans (Bureau of Labor Statistics). The Federal Reserve system reported people aged 18 to 29 have shown they have financial constraints, with Deloitte reporting high financial insecurity among Gen Z (Federal Reserve Board Publication). To add on, the American College Health Association reports 76.4% of people have a moderate/high stress as a highlighted indicator, with Healthy Minds reporting substantial anxiety and depression symptom prevalence (American College Health Association). High anxiety, depression, and stress levels lead to a low desire for social connection. It is evident that people have financial constraints and mental health leads to less efforts to socialize, while in fact they want to socialize, especially on the weekends.

The target segment are college students between the ages of 18 and 23. Their core need in the travel and activity product category is fun activities and budgeting. This is reflected in the survey conducted amongst 27 participants, 96.3% being college students (Appendix A1). 59.3%

of them selected fun activities as the most important aspect of a vacation, while 33.3% selected budgeting. Among activity options, travel/day trips, outdoor activities, and nightlife/social events ranked within the top three. 51.9 % of participants spend 2+ hours researching vacation options. The most frequent planning problems that participants experience are choice disagreement and planning being too lengthy, with 70.9 % of participants selecting pricing as one of their top issues. 77.8% of participants said they would be interested in a blind activity box. For pricing, 40.7% said they would pay \$10-25, with 33.3% saying they would pay under \$10. Additionally, 96.3% said they would use an app that plans group activities based on people's preferences and budgets. 63.0% would pay \$200 or under, while 22.2% would pay \$200-\$300 for a planned experience that includes a preplanned vacation with a fully planned itinerary.

College students have the need for budget friendly activities and vacations. However, the activities that they attribute as fun are usually priced highly. Their perception of the current solution is overwhelming, time consuming, and lacks personalization. People tend to use Google, social media, shared digital calendars, and itinerary sites to plan their vacations. Some of these applications are Google, TikTok, TimeTree, Lucktrip, and Hoku. Since everything is scattered, the planning becomes stressful, and the activity/vacation starts to feel like a chore. SideQuest combines all these tools into one app, while also doing all the work for the user.

Overall, the survey demonstrates that college aged students have a desire to have an application that will plan budget friendly activities and vacations that will minimize their planning process, while also prioritizing their favorite activities.

From conducting nine in-depth interviews, several consistent patterns emerged regarding how college students plan activities (Appendix A2). First, planning is highly unstructured and often relies on informal methods such as group chats and spontaneous decision making. Many participants described themselves as “go with the flow” or dependent on others taking the lead. Another point across multiple interviews was coordination difficulty, particularly with aligning schedules, preferences and budgets. Interviewees expressed frustration with getting “everyone on the same page” and factor decision fatigue, especially when choosing where to eat and what activity to do. Reactions to the “blind box activity” were mixed but positive. Many participants found it intriguing and exciting, especially in situations where no one had a clear idea. Other participants, especially those who are more type-A, expressed hesitation and stated they prefer to plan activities themselves to make sure plans align with their preferences. Trust in an app based solution was conditional, most participants said they would be willing to use an app if it included fillers, personalization, real user input (not just AI) and features like shared calendars and/or polling tools. Key concerns included lack of personalization, overly generic or trendy recommendations and difficulty getting all group members to adopt the platform.

It was found that people are interested in blind box activities and preplanned vacations. There is a need for these products, especially if they are an indecisive planner. Planning tools reduce the stress many have found from the activity and vacation planning experience. By utilizing these products, they enjoy their activities and vacations without the added stress.

Challenge and Opportunity

Gen Z and young adults need social connection and interaction. Many desire to create these connections and to meet with their friends but are constrained to do so. In fact, people crave social connection and socializing. In fact, according to Impact360 Institute, 54% of Gen Z strongly agree that in-person relationships are more valuable than digital relationships which directly supports how Gen Z wants real-life connection (Impact360 Institute). Yet, despite this desire for real-life connection, there has been a sharp decline in social interaction among Gen Z

and a growing prevalence in loneliness seen more than any other generation. A GWI report conducted a research in November 2024 across 1,821 Gen Z respondents worldwide and found that 80% of these respondents had reported feeling lonely in the past 12 months (Harlow), a sharp contrast to just 45% of baby boomers feeling lonely (Harlow). This is a stark contradiction given how much Gen Z desire real-life connection

Essentially, Gen Z faces a clear misalignment between their need for social connection and the limitations of existing solutions. Using the Need Recognition Model, this gap can be understood as a discrepancy between students' actual state and ideal state. Students want social connections that are effortless, affordable, and enjoyable; yet, their real experience is shaped by decision fatigue, time scarcity, financial pressure, and difficulty in coordinating group plans (De Witte). Current solutions like event apps, social media, and group chats help people discover options, but they do not remove the burden of choosing, budgeting, and organizing. As a result, there is an unmet need.

This gap is especially strong for college students and Gen Z because they often face limitations such as disposable income and high stress levels, making planning social outings more stressful than rewarding. Research on student financial stress shows that students with financial strain struggle to maintain friendships because they feel they are unable to participate in social events. Financial anxiety has been linked to negative social integration issues among college students, including feelings of social isolation and the conflict of balancing between academic and social demands (Potter et al.). Gen Z consumers hesitate when plans feel expensive, vague, or risky which creates an opening for status quo bias. When planning feels too complicated, people would default to staying at home or repeating the same low-effort behaviors instead of trying something new (Gordon). In other words, the problem is not a lack of interest in socializing, it is friction in the decision process.

The Theory of Reasoned Action helps explain how this friction leads to inaction. While many students have positive attitudes towards social activities, their intention to act weakens once they believe planning is too stressful, time-consuming, or likely to fail. Research on undergraduate students confirms that chronic stress undermines decision-making and problem-solving skills, and that social withdrawal is a common action students take to avoid social situations and cope with the pressure (Kavitha et al.). Subjective norms add to this as well: when no one in the group is willing to take initiative, plans stall entirely as everyone loses motivation to plan. This reinforces a cycle of social inertia even among people who genuinely desire real-life connection.

This leaves an opportunity for a new solution that can reduce planning friction, financial concerns, and lowers perceived risk. SideQuest, the app, must deliver on convenience, affordability, and a sense of control, while still making the experience feel exciting and worth pursuing. The key is not to offer more options, but to make the path from intention to action as effortless as possible.

Solution A (Product): SideQuest

SideQuest is a mobile app that transforms group planning from a stressful coordination task into a fast, low-effort, and rewarding social experience. Rather than forcing users to search across multiple platforms, compare endless options, and negotiate plans through group chats, SideQuest gives users one curated activity recommendation based on the group's shared preferences, budget, availability, and transportation constraints. The concept directly addresses the core need identified earlier: reducing social inertia caused by decision fatigue, planning stress, and uncertainty.

The onboarding process is intentionally simple. Users first select interests such as food, outdoors, creative activities, wellness, nightlife, or adventure. They then choose a price tier and invite friends to form a “crew” (Appendix C2). Each invited friend’s preferences are automatically considered, creating a collaborative planning system without requiring lengthy back-and-forth discussion. This feature solves a major pain point found in our research: conflicting preferences and the difficulty of finding something everyone enjoys. Instead of forcing one person to become the planner, the app acts as a neutral coordinator.

Once the crew is formed, SideQuest introduces its signature “blind box” reveal mechanic. Rather than presenting dozens of options that create cognitive overload, the app reveals one high-fit activity personalized to the group. This bounded surprise model maintains excitement while reducing the anxiety of pure randomness. Users still retain control through preset filters such as budget, distance, time available, and disliked activities. In means-end chain terms, concrete filters and preference inputs lead to a personalized recommendation, which creates confidence and convenience, ultimately fulfilling the greater overall need for effortless real-world social connection.

The recommended activity card includes transparent pricing per person, estimated travel time, suitability for group size, and duration. For example, users may receive a pottery class for three people at \$25 each, located 0.8 miles away, starting at 7:30 PM. These features reduce hidden-cost anxiety and logistical uncertainty, two barriers strongly associated with abandoned plans. Instead of wondering whether an outing will be too expensive or too far, users receive immediate clarity. This transforms vague intentions like “we should do something tonight” into an actionable plan.

To further reduce inertia, SideQuest includes a “Re-roll” option that lets users swap the recommendation for another curated activity if the first choice does not fit. This preserves autonomy while still limiting excessive choice. Behavioral research shows consumers are more likely to act when options feel manageable rather than unlimited. By giving users one or two quality choices instead of fifty, SideQuest lowers decision fatigue and increases follow-through. Finally, the app uses light gamification to make planning enjoyable rather than burdensome. Users complete “quests,” rate experiences, upload photos, and unlock badges such as “Creative Explorer.” These rewards create positive associations with going out and reinforce repeated usage. Instead of social planning being seen as another chore, SideQuest reframes it as a fun ritual with friends.

Overall, SideQuest converts a friction-heavy planning process into a one-tap solution. Its combination of collaborative preference matching, transparent logistics, curated surprise, and gamified rewards directly addresses the unmet consumer need for convenient, affordable, and exciting in-person connections.

Solution B: Marketing Campaign

The SideQuest marketing campaign is designed to raise awareness of the app and to convert Gen Z’s desire for social connection into actual behavior by reducing the friction between the ideal and actual state caused by group planning. While college students value shared experiences, their behavior is constrained by decision fatigue, choice overload, budget uncertainty, and coordination challenges. SideQuest addresses this need by transforming planning into a low-effort, gamified process. The campaign communicates this value by showing how SideQuest makes socializing easy, attainable, and rewarding. Rather than positioning the

app as a planning tool, the campaign reframes it as a way to make sure plans “make it out of the groupchat”.

The campaign leverages both the central and peripheral routes to persuasion as seen in the Elaboration Likelihood model. The first asset is a long-form ad called “SideQuesting in Color” which follows a more emotionally engaging, narrative-driven approach (Appendix D1). It begins by depicting a common pain point: two friends trying to plan an outing through fragmented communication, uncertainty about cost, and lack of clear direction. The storyboard starts with black-and-white visuals to reinforce the negative effect associated with planning stress and highlights the gap identified in the Need Recognition Model between the actual state (indecision, inaction) and the ideal state (fun, seamless social experiences). The introduction of SideQuest serves as a trigger that shifts the experience into full color, visually representing reduced friction, increased clarity, and positive emotional outcomes. This asset serves to raise awareness and consideration of the new platform. The transformation of scenes communicates the app’s key product benefits of convenience, affordability, and excitement. It strengthens the audiences’ behavioral intention in line with the Theory of Reasoned Action and Need Recognition Model, as users see that planning is easy, predictable, and likely to result in a successful outcome.

In contrast, our second asset is an influencer marketing strategy that focuses on the peripheral route to persuasion, using authenticity, relatability, and social proof to drive interest and adoption (Appendix D2). Instead of scripted content, SideQuest partners with college lifestyle influencers whose content naturally features friend groups and spontaneous outings. These influencers will create short-form UGC in native-style videos that mimic casual social interactions (e.g., “we’ve been sitting here for 30 minutes trying to decide what to do”), followed by an introduction of the app before a quick transition back to their resulting activity. This approach minimizes persuasion knowledge and reduces consumer reactance by making content feel genuine instead of an advertisement. By emphasizing similarity between the influencer and the audience, the campaign increases source credibility and perceived relevance, which strengthens attitudes and behavioral intentions. Additionally, repeated exposure to peer usage builds normative influence, signaling that using SideQuest is a common and socially accepted behavior.

Through these assets, the marketing campaign reinforces the app’s means-end chain. Concrete attributes like preference matching, budget filters, and blind-box recommendation system leads to key consequences of reduced planning effort, faster decision-making, and increased confidence in plans. These consequences fulfill higher-order values of belonging, enjoyment, and freedom from stress. The messaging consistently emphasizes that SideQuest removes the hardest part of socializing (getting started) while preserving the excitement of discovery.

Overall, the campaign succeeds by aligning closely with the identified consumer need: reducing social inertia. By combining a narrative-driven transformation ad with authentic,

peer-driven influencer content, SideQuest is positioned not just as a tool, but as a behavioral solution that makes going out easier than staying in.

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Appendix

Appendices

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A1. Quantitative Research: Survey

A structured survey was conducted to understand Gen Z students' behaviors, preferences, and pain points when planning social activities and vacations. It was used to understand what might motivate students to desire in-person activities and what factors can prevent them from these activities. Factors that were gauged were time spent planning, common challenges, and an interest in a gamified solution in the form of a "blind box".

These answers were then used to help build our understanding of consumer challenges and needs in order to create a solution.

Survey Link:

https://usc.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3pD8hmkLnjDVnMi

Raw Data:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bYqZ-0QXCl3JsdsNVTZhcMZuo8JyQ0nO/view?usp=sharing>

Survey Questions:

1. How old are you?
2. Are you currently a college student?
3. What is the most important aspect of planning a vacation for you?
4. What types of activities do you enjoy most? (Select up to 3)
5. When planning vacations, how much time do you spend researching options?
6. Which of the following planning problems have you experienced? (Select all that apply)
7. How often do plans fall through due to disagreements or inability to compromise?
8. How interested would you be in an app that suggests surprise ("blind box") activities based on your preferences?
9. Which features would be most useful? (Select up to 3)
10. Would you use an app that plans group activities based on everyone's preferences and budget?
11. What price would you be willing to pay for an activity kit?
(*Definition: A package that includes all required items to participate in an activity*)
12. What price would you be willing to pay for a planned experience?
(*Definition: A preplanned vacation with a fully organized itinerary*)

A2. Qualitative Research: Interview Guide

In-depth interviews with college students were conducted with 6 students to further explore attitudes toward group planning, frustrations, and reactions to a gamified, blind box concept. This helped us gain deeper insight into what elements should be incorporated into our solution, SideQuest.

Link to Transcript:  MKT 450: Qualitative Research In-depth Interviews.pdf

Objective: Understand college students' needs, behaviors, and perceptions regarding social/activity planning.

Research Goals

- Identify planning behaviors and decision-making processes
- Understand key frustrations and pain points
- Evaluate reactions to a gamified, “blind box activity experience”

Interview Details

- Total interviews conducted: 8 (Goal: 6)
- Interviewers: Fiorella Sosa Barahona, Wyatt Mackellar

Interview Questions:

- How do you usually decide what to do with friends
- What's the most frustrating part of planning outings?
- Have you ever felt overwhelmed by too many options or group coordination?
- What was your first reaction to a “blind box activity experience”?
- Would you trust an app to plan an outing for you?
- What concerns would you have about this specific service/app?

Findings by Interviewers

- There's no structured system when it comes to planning, it's all very informal
- Scheduling is the biggest challenge with pain points like coordinating availability, delayed responses, and waiting for others
- Group alignment is difficult due to varying preferences, budgets, and moods, making it hard to agree on plan
- Sometimes people get overwhelmed with too many options especially when it comes to food or limited time. This leads some people to defer decisions or stick to familiar choices
- Students want easier planning but don't want to lose control over decisions
- There are mixed reactions to “blind box”. Some students see it as fun and helpful for spontaneity, others see it as too random and not personalized
- There's conditional trust in apps as people are open to apps with filters, reviews, and coordination tools. Yet, they are also skeptical as they feel it can be a bit unnecessary or intrusive
- Key concerns: Lack of personalization, overuse of AI, low group adoption, and not solving coordination issues
- Core insight: The main problem isn't finding activities, it's coordinating people efficiently without losing a natural, flexible experience

Appendix B: Secondary Research Summary

B1. Gamification and Gen Z Engagement

- How gamification works is rooted in how our brains are wired
- Gamification taps into 2 types of motivation:
 - **Extrinsic Motivation:** Rewards like points, badges, and levels provide tangible incentives
 - **Intrinsic Motivation:** Rewards like mastery, progress, and social connection make activities enjoyable
- Our brains crave dopamine, a neurotransmitter tied to pleasure
- Gamification delivers it through a "reward loop."
 - We perform actions, get rewarded, release dopamine, and become hooked on repeating the process – this drives repeated engagement
- Examples of Gamification:
 - Learning Platforms: Quizzes turned into games, badges for skill mastery, and learning journeys designed as levels. Duolingo, a language learning app, allows you to earn experience points to level up, maintain daily streaks and compete with friends on leaderboards.
 - Marketing Campaigns: Contests, interactive challenges, and loyalty programs with rewards for engagement. Examples are brands that run social media contests where participants submit original content (photos, videos) for a chance to win prizes.

Top 15 Gamification Elements

01 Points System	06 Rewards and Incentives	11 Virtual Currency
02 Leaderboards	07 Feedback Loops	12 Customization Options
03 Badges/Achievements	08 Levels and Unlockables	13 Time-Limited Challenges
04 Progress Bars	09 Social Engagement	14 Social Sharing
05 Challenges and Quests	10 Storytelling/Narratives	15 Easter Eggs

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- Relevant gamification elements for the app:
 - **Rewards and Incentives:** tangible or intangible benefits users receive for completing actions, challenges, or reaching milestones within a gamified

experience. They are the primary motivation that encourages users to participate or continue engaging.

- Rewards tap into the dopamine-driven satisfaction cycle as other gamification elements. The pleasure of the reward reinforces the desired behavior. Using a mix of predictable and unpredictable rewards keeps users hooked, as the element of surprise is particularly stimulating.
- Examples:
 - Tangible Rewards: Discounts, free products, exclusive content, and physical items (e.g., badges for scouts).
 - Intangible Rewards: Personalized experiences, early access to features, social recognition, and elevated status in the gamified environment
- **Social engagement:** encompasses features that encourage interaction, collaboration, or competition among users. This could be through leaderboards, teams, or social interaction.
 - Shared experiences and friendly competition foster a sense of belonging and connection within the gamified environment. Seeing others' progress can spark healthy competition and a desire to improve (leaderboards). Teaming up or collaborating on challenges creates accountability and offers a support system
 - Examples:
 - Fitness Challenges: Apps like Strava allow friends to see each other's workout logs and offer encouragement.
 - Crowdsourced Learning: Platforms like Duolingo sometimes use community-driven translations to improve content, building a sense of contribution

Gen Z Consumer Behavior

- Ease and Clarity: Gen Z has short attention spans and less patience for complex systems. Gamification targeting them must focus on ease of understanding and intuitive design.
- Shared Experiences: Gen Z prioritizes connection and shared experiences. Gamification provides a perfect vehicle to tap into this need by fostering communities centered around common interests or goals
- Effective in engaging this demographic is gamification—the application of game-like mechanics in non-gaming contexts such as marketing, e-commerce, and customer engagement. Businesses that successfully implement gamification can not only capture Gen Z's attention but also drive loyalty, repeat purchases, and stronger brand affinity

Why Gen Z Responds Well to Gamification

- Gen Z consumers have been immersed in gaming culture since childhood
 - Playing mobile games, using social media filters, competing on platforms like TikTok challenges, etc

- They naturally gravitate toward interactive and competitive experiences.
- Gamification resonates with them because it transforms ordinary interactions into fun, rewarding, and memorable moments
- Some reasons why gamification works particularly well with Gen Z include:
 - **Instant Gratification:** They love immediate rewards, whether it's points, badges, or discounts
 - **Competition and Collaboration:** Features like leaderboards, group challenges, and social sharing make participation more exciting
 - **Progress Tracking:** Leveling up or unlocking new stages creates a sense of accomplishment
 - **Personalization:** Gamification allows brands to tailor experiences based on user behavior, increasing relevance
- Simply put, gamification taps into the psychology of motivation—keeping Gen Z engaged far longer than traditional marketing methods
- Video games are a significant part of Gen Z's cultural landscape
- According to the Entertainment Software Association, 90% of Gen Z play video games, and they spend an average of 7 hours per week gaming ([Visual Capitalist](#))
- This extensive exposure to gaming has shaped their expectations for interaction and engagement, making traditional, passive consumption less appealing. Gen Z is accustomed to dynamic, interactive experiences that offer instant feedback, rewards, and a sense of progression
- Hyper-interactivity, driven by gamification and interactive content, can significantly enhance brand loyalty and customer engagement
- According to a report by PwC, highly engaged customers are 90% more likely to buy more frequently and spend 60% more per transaction ([Visual Capitalist](#)). For Gen Z, interactive and gamified experiences can turn mundane interactions into memorable ones, fostering a deeper emotional connection with the brand

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B2. Target Demographic

- College Students as Primary Audience
 - College students often have constrained schedules due to coursework and part-time or full-time employment
 - In October 2024, 21.7 million individuals aged 16–24 were enrolled in school, with many also participating in the labor force
 - Leisure time is limited and must compete with academic and work responsibilities
 - This supports the need for solutions that reduce planning time and simplify group coordination
- Gen Z and Millennials as Secondary Audiences
 - Millennials are typically defined as born 1981–1996, and Gen Z as born 1997 onward
Most college students fall within Gen Z, while older students and early-career individuals overlap with Millennials.
 - These groups share similar challenges, including busy schedules, budget constraints, and reliance on digital platforms
 - The product can expand beyond students to early-career users experiencing “post-college friction.”
- Digital Content Behaviors
 - Social media plays a major role in how younger audiences discover activities and make decision
 - Approximately half of individuals aged 18–29 use TikTok daily, with high engagement across platforms like YouTube
 - Younger users are more likely than older groups to rely on digital and social content for discovery
 - This supports marketing strategies focused on:
 - User-generated content (UGC)
 - Shareable “reveal” moments
 - Brand accounts that curate and repost content

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B3. User Needs and Perceptions

- Time Scarcity & Coordination Friction
 - Social time is limited and uneven across the week
 - Individuals average ~35 minutes per day socializing, with more time on weekends than weekdays
 - Students struggle to coordinate schedules and make quick group decisions
- Choice Overload and Decision Fatigue
 - Too many options can reduce follow-through, depending on context
 - Decision outcomes are influenced by both the environment and user characteristics
 - Users experience difficulty answering “what should everyone do?”
- Financial Constraints & Price Predictability
 - Financial stress is common among younger consumers
 - Only 66% of ages 18–29 report financial well-being, lower than older groups
 - Many Gen Z and Millennials live paycheck-to-paycheck and feel financially insecure
- Mental Health, Stress and Low-Energy Socializing

- High levels of stress, anxiety, and depression are reported among students.²⁴
- 76.4% of students report moderate or high stress.²⁴
- Students prefer low-effort, low-pressure social activities.
- Desire for Social Connection and Social Proof
 - Students still value social connection despite limited time
 - Social media strongly influences decision-making
 - 62% of users have made travel decisions based on social content
- Accessibility Needs
 - Over 21% of undergraduate students identify with a disability
 - 81% of travelers with disabilities use online tools to find accessible activities
- Condition-of-Location Data and Risk Reduction
 - Wait times, busyness, and visit duration affect experience success
 - Data is based on aggregated user activity and only shown when reliable
- Blind-Box Perception and Consumer Psychology
 - Uncertainty increases curiosity and emotional engagement
 - Can also lead to impulsive behavior and irrational decisions
 - Low perceived control reduces purchase intent
- Unboxing Culture and Shareability
 - Reveal moments can influence behavior through social and emotional engagement
 - Unboxing content creates shareable, engaging experiences

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B4. Competitive Landscape

Product	Surprise Element	Group Collaboration	Price Splitting	Calendar Integration	Accessibility Metadata	Monetization
The Nudge	Curated plans, not true mystery reveal	Not positioned as group constraint tool	Not a core feature	No .ics export; text-based plans	Not emphasized	Free + paid "Plus" subscription
Pack Up + Go	Core feature (surprise travel)	Group travel supported, but limited collaboration tools	Not built-in	Not emphasized	Not emphasized	Paid trip planning & booking
Wanderlog	Not a surprise product	Strong real-time collaboration	Expense tracking & splitting included	Focus on Google Maps/export, not .ics	Not emphasized	Free + optional Pro
Fever	No surprise (event discovery)	Limited (ticket sharing only)	Not built-in	Not emphasized	Not emphasized	Ticketing commissions & affiliates
Splitwise	No	Core feature (group expenses)	Core feature	No calendar integration	Not applicable	Freemium + paid Pro
Triplt	No	Basic sharing (not preference-based)	Not built-in	Strong calendar sync (.ics supported)	Not emphasized	Free + Pro subscription
Roadtrippers	No	Collaboration (paid tiers)	Not built-in	Limited; not core feature	Not emphasized	Tiered subscription (Free-Premium)
ClassPass	No	Limited (invites only)	Not built-in	Not emphasized	Not emphasized	Subscription credit model
Airbnb	No (experience-based discovery)	Group booking available, but not preference aggregation	Not built-in (price breakdown only)	Strong iCal integration (hosts)	Strong filters (e.g., step-free, sensory)	Service fee model

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<https://apps.apple.com/hn/app/wanderlog-travel-planner/id1476732439>.

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Appendix C: Solution

C1. Solution Product: Logo and Typography

Logo:

OpenArt. AI-generated image. OpenArt,
<https://openart.ai/share/SFBjVDe2T0I4Zkptd1FpWk9FUEw7aHR0cHM6Ly9jZG4ub3BlbmFydC5haS91cGxvYWRzL2ltYWdlX0xOWlk3MEU2XzE3NzYxMjU0OTg4MDIhNTEyLndlYnA>.

Prompt: “minimalist app logo, abstract rounded square representing a gift box, subtle open lid to symbolize a reveal, integrated "SQ" monogram inside the gift box, clean geometric lines, soft rounded edges, flat coral color (#FF5A3C), modern startup aesthetic white background, no gradients, no 3D, no detailed illustration, highly refined”



Typography:


OpenArt. AI-generated image. OpenArt,
<https://openart.ai/share/SVJROWdCWjlUczVkVmhSWE01dFo7aHR0cHM6Ly9jZG4ub3BlbmFydC5haS91cGxvYWRzL2ltYWdlX18yUmplVnN5XzE3NzYxMjU0OTg4MDIhNTEyLndlYnA>.

Prompt: “Spell "SIDEQUEST" IN WHITE color, modern startup aesthetic white background, no gradients, no 3D, no detailed illustration, highly refined”



C2: App Demo

SideQuest App Demo:

 sidequest_demo.mov

Appendix D: Marketing Campaign

D1. “SideQuesting in Color” – Long-Form Ad

Concept Overview:

A narrative-driven advertisement contrasting the frustration of group planning with the excitement of spontaneous, app-generated experiences.

Storyboard:

Scene 1 (Black & White– Introduction to Problem)

- Setting: 2 different apartment rooms/flats
- 2 friends are trying to plan a trip but they are in different locations: one is in DTLA and the other in Silver Lake
- Pans to Actor 1 and their phone where there is a text message dialogue happening between Actor 1 and 2
- Dialogue could include:
 - “What do u wanna do?”
 - “IDK somewhere cheap tho, i dont have much funds”
 - “Hmmm do u have a location in mind?”
 - “Maybe grab brunch somewhere?”
 - “But where should we go? There’s like a million places...”
 - “Idk...”
- Stress is visible in Actor 1’s face
- Camera pans to Actor 2 who shares the stressed emotion then back to text messages
- Dialogue:
 - “Is it even worth atp?”
 - <insert ... typing bubbles>
- Slow pacing, dull, can feel the stress and lack of eagerness through the grimy B&W format

Scene 2: Trigger State

- Actor 2’s phone lights up with a notification, suddenly SideQuest’s neon orange logo is the only thing with color
 - Sound effect of notification
- Entranced, Actor 2 opens the notification

Scene 3: Transformation

- All of the sudden, entire screen bursts into color that spills out of the phone and slowly seeps into the real world
- App interface illuminates preferences selected and invitation to invite friend
- Pans to Actor 1 who opens the invitation
- Actor 1’s phone app interface lights up with a blind box that spins and opens

Scene 4: Reward

- Activity revealed: brunch in Silver Lake with a fun, free yoga pop-up at Echo Park happening the day they want to meet
- Friends react excitedly
- Message chat is filled with excited emojis

Scene 5 (Outcome)

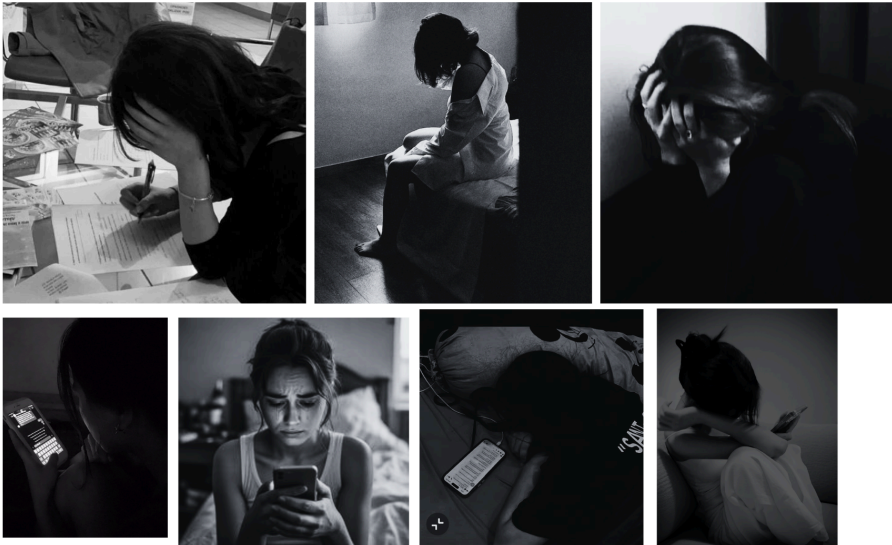
- Montage of them enjoying the brunch event and Yoga at Echo Park
- Bright, saturated visuals

End Frame

- Logo + slogan: “Make it Out of the GroupChat”
 - In italicized at the bottom is “SideQuest in Color”

Moodboard

Scene 1-2 (B&W)



Scene 3

Image was from Pinterest, ChatGPT created a notification template at the top where I used Adobe Photoshop to add the logo and texts

“Add an app notification template to the top of the phone screen in the picture with a white background.” *ChatGPT*, OpenAI, 17 Apr. 2026,

<https://chatgpt.com/share/e/69e3027d-a0a8-8004-84ad-82e5bd6ee24d>.

Prompt: “add an app notification template to the top of the phone screen in the picture with a white background”



Scene 4-5



End Frame Mockup



D2. Influencer Marketing Strategy

Strategy Overview:

Partners with both macro- and micro-influencers on TikTok and Instagram to promote SideQuest that highlights different user pain points (budget constraints, indecision, coordination issues) and how SideQuest solves them.

Content Formats:

1. Carousels on Instagram and TikTok
 - a. Type 1:
 - i. First Slide: “We let an app plan our Spring Break for us” or “A spontaneous trip to ___ for fall break with SideQuest”
 - ii. Following Slides: Pictures of food, activities like pottery making, snorkeling, wine tasting, picnics, etc → whatever activities SideQuest planned for them
 - b. Type 2:
 - i. One post could be dedicated to a specific activity SideQuest gave them that they wouldn’t have known before
 - c. Examples:
 - i. <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8gPrMgV/>
 - ii. <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8gPMqTy/>
2. Vlog → perfect for influencers like Erika Ha who already make vlogs
 - a. Could be short form videos on TikTok/Instagram, or longer form videos on YouTube
 - b. Clips should show the opening of the blindboxes and then going on the different activities based on the blindboxes
 - c. Vlog should show a level of spontaneity and surprise for both the viewer and the influencer themselves
 - d. Examples:
 - i. <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8gPrr7X/>
 - ii. <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8gPJntR/>
3. Trendy Videos
 - a. Videos using trendy audios to show the planning process before using SideQuest vs. after, all the activities people went on using SideQuest, etc
 - b. Example audios:
 - i. <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP9L4CD9RsqaL-LnxvG/>
 - ii. <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP9L4Cfr9gQVG-nDnPb/>